

Hope and Dread

The Franciscan



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The Society of Saint Francis

Protector of the Society: The Bishop of New York

Minister General: Brother Geoffrey S.S.F.

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Note: * Sisters † Brothers ‡ Administration

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Pax et bonum.

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Plaistow
London E13 8AQ

The envelope should be marked FRANCISCAN.

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9.30 a.m.—11.30 a.m., 2 p.m.—4 p.m., 6 p.m.—8 p.m.

Enquiries re Guest House and other departments should be made in writing to the appropriate Sister.

The community will be in retreat 6—11 February inclusive.

CASSETTE

Peter Douglas has recorded some of his favourite songs on cassette to swell the funds for S. David's hall roof. These are now available, for a donation of £2.50, from S. David's Friary, 135 Boswall Parkway, Edinburgh EH5 2LY.

Brother Barnabas at York at the time of the General Synod last July.

Reproduced by courtesy of *The Guardian*.



Hope and Dread



IN Samuel Beckett's play *Endgame*, where a small group of people occupy themselves with set routines, we are aware that they are living in the middle of nowhere. One of them looks out of the window and reports 'Zero'. How many of us feel that it is in just such a limbo that we are now living?

The awareness of the world's violence, hunger, unrest and tribulation which is brought to us daily through the news media, brings with it a sense of precariousness. Nothing seems assured. Everywhere things fall apart. Nostalgia for past, less dangerous times, is very strong. There is little hope for the future but a great deal of dread.

Many of us find it difficult to believe that, sooner or later, the bomb will not go off; or that leaking atomic waste will not corrode us. Science, which was to have been the saviour of the human race, may prove its undoing. Even if those unspeakable horrors are avoided, medical science, which helps us live longer, is giving its practitioners a frightening power over the pattern of life and death. All around us, there is the fear of a loss of order and stability in social life, often cast upon radical minorities.

The church is widely unheeded and ignored even in a time of renewed religious interest, which has frequently found its expression in odd and unfamiliar forms. There is a pathetic fascination for those who are prepared to take a strong line and propose strong remedies.

And now, Lord, what is our hope? Truly our hope is even in you . . .

Loss of confidence in human institutions can lead to confidence in God alone. Yet this does not mean that we can step out of the situation of anxiety and doubt and cling to God in some untroubled Arcadia. For God also is in the situation.

It has been said that one must think like a saint in order to be a merely decent Christian. Without some wide vision of achievement we can scarcely get on with the next chore. Our hope in God allows us to live in confidence of his ultimate triumph, and in that confidence we may go about whatever task in his service is the next to confront us.

The Minister General's Letter

My dear friends,

The birth of our Lord Jesus Christ has been traditionally associated with animals. S. Luke tells us that the child Jesus was laid in a manger 'because there was no room for them to lodge in the house'. Although there is no mention of any animals present it is assumed that, since he was laid in a manger used by animals for feeding, animals were probably there, and no Christmas card is complete without an ox and an ass. So it may be that apart from Mary and Joseph only animals were present to welcome the eternal Word of God as he slipped into this world and took flesh.

Certainly we know that from Celano's account of the first Crib at Greccio 'the manger was prepared, the hay had been brought, the ox and ass were led in'. There was no representation of Mary and Joseph or of shepherds, but just an ox and ass. And so the Midnight Mass was celebrated and 'the night was lighted up like the day, and it delighted men and beasts'. It has always been assumed also that the shepherds who were the first to worship the incarnate Lord brought some of their sheep with them.

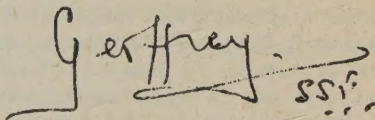
Francis had a wonderfully sensitive affinity with the animal world. One of the best known stories is of him quieting the birds while he was preaching and afterwards he preached to them. We think of the falcon that came every day to his window when he was at a hermitage to wake him, and countless are the stories about his relationship with animals whom he called his brothers and sisters. It would seem that the redeemed creation includes the animal world where they have an acceptable place and dignity and live together in unity rather than fighting and living off each other. And so when the Messiah comes, the shoot from the stock of Jesse, we see not only the sevenfold gifts of the Spirit filling mankind but also 'The wolf shall live with the sheep, and the leopard lie down with the kid; the calf and the young lion shall grow up together, and a little child shall lead them'. (Isaiah xi: 6.)

What a different picture of the animal world we see today. On the one hand animals have become pets. There is nothing wrong with befriending animals—the horse has been called the friend of man. But there is also a sentimentality about animals in which they become projections of their owners or compensations and this often takes away their independence and dignity as animals. Restaurants and beauty

parlours for dogs is going a little far! We have circuses in which great jungle animals are made to be buffoons for our pleasure. In the realm of agriculture we have seen the ascent of the agribusinessman whose farms are primarily business enterprises and animals can be subjected to every kind of exploitation, indignity and suffering in the sacred cause of commercial profit. As we savour our succulent veal are we aware that an animal that is still young and tender has been sacrificed for our pleasure? Lastly, we see increasingly inhumane experiments being carried out on animals in the cause of science.

In the Genesis creation story God said to Adam whom he created in his image, 'Be fruitful and increase, fill the earth and subdue it, rule over the fish in the sea, the birds of heaven, and everything that moves upon the earth'. Man has the power and the authority over the animal world, but as in other spheres of life he must exercise restraint and responsibility, and most of all curb his selfish greed. I am not myself a vegetarian, though I respect those who are of that persuasion. Through the Bible we find the people of God feasting on animals and offering them in sacrifice, even young calves and lambs. But we need to safeguard and ensure the rights of animals to a natural life before they are taken for our food—the rights of chicken to enjoy freedom and not life-long imprisonment in batteries, to take but one instance. We need to get our values right and not sell our souls to the god Money. Jesus said, 'Set your mind on God's kingdom and his justice before everything else, and all the rest will come to you as well'. If an economic policy was based on these words we might find a happier, more just and more prosperous world emerging. Let us start by taking them as our own individual rule of life for 1984.

May God's peace fill you in this new year,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Geoffrey'. The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right. Below the main signature, there are some smaller, less distinct markings that could be initials or a date.

Minister General.

Brother Silyn

After an energetic month of mission, Brother Silyn returned to Glasshampton on 7 November, and two days later died of a coronary thrombosis. He will be much missed by very many friends, especially in Wales. We hope to include a fuller obituary in our next number.

Brother Nicholas

Address given at the Memorial Service for Brother Nicholas at S. Philip's Church, Plaistow on 18 September, 1983, by Brother Victor.

UNLESS you change and become like children, you will never enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Surely if ever there was a text for Nicholas that is it. Nicky the childlike and humble in heart (the 40 watt bulb as he described himself). The man in whom there was no guile—charmingly simple. Some people could make the mistake of thinking him naive or simplistic, but that really would be a mistake. He was a very complex character, a flawed and vulnerable human being as we all are, but who came to trust and delight in the Lord totally. He had a heart *made* simple and therefore of almost unlimited usefulness.

It was a fascinating and absorbing exercise going through his sermons—they tell you so much about the person who wrote them. In fact they are highly revealing, and it has made me resolve to destroy mine in case anyone should be tempted to do the same thing with them! Actually Nicky's have a refreshing directness and with a constancy which is so truly remarkable—really he had about eight great themes which got reworked like a kaleidoscope. Some of the best ones are sadly unusable, either because it is extremely difficult for anyone other than Nicholas to say 'Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall' with any degree of conviction—or because Nicky's use of the English Language was, shall we say, singular, and they lose a lot in translation! But one or two things I must say—briefly.

* * *

Nicky the Pied Piper—the man who adored children and they him with extraordinary readiness. The empathy which existed between Nicky and children, whether on a children's mission with his puppets, or by their side on a sick bed was always lovely to witness. Untold thousands of kids have come under the spell of this particular Pied Piper, either for a short time as on a visit to a church on a Sunday, or over a longer time like the children in the local schools of which he was a governor. But every one of them gained something precious from him, a prayer, a story, a chuckle, but chiefly the warmth from his heart. Almost the last thing he had to do with the local kids was in this church last January. He had arranged for the Grange Road Juniors to come and look round and have a little service. He of course had been desperately ill all over Christmas, we thought he was going to die then—but no, back he bounced. He came out of hospital on the 5th January, the children came here on the 6th, the Feast of the Epiphany, and so wrapped in his brown cloak with his brownie's hat on his head, I drove him the two hundred yards to church. He came in quietly and sat at the back where the crib was and where his puppets now are—soon someone spotted him and excited whispers of 'Brother Nicholas, Brother Nicholas' went round the church as the children simply ignored both the vicar and the teachers and flocked round him. The sight of Nicky fixing them with his eye, and with trembling telling them the story of the three wise men as they sat on the floor with eyes wide open, will stay with me for a very long time.

Mind you I don't think you realise what the rest of us had to put up with because of Nicky. Most of the local kids seem to assume that we are all called Brother

Nicholas and that we all have badges under our 'flaps' and puppets in our pockets, and when we fail to produce them, such looks of disappointment and withering scorn cross their faces—we are clearly just frauds and not the genuine article at *all!*

* * *

From the Pied Piper to the Gleaner. Nicholas prided himself on being a gleaner, his room was like Aladdin's Cave—'if you want it, Nicky's got it'—was a favourite response of his when someone wanted a needle and thread, or a bell, or a carpet sweeper or some drawing pins—anything and everything found its way into that room, and stopped there. Clearly Ruth was one of his favourite books in the bible, and any girl or woman named Ruth was usually treated to Nicky raising his finger and saying with glee—'She gleaned!'

However this magpie instinct was not in any way selfish—when he said 'If you want it, Nicky's got it', that is exactly what he meant, it was totally available for us to use. He may have gleaned avidly but he gave generously.

* * *

Now to Nicky the Brother. For those interested in statistics, Nicholas was a brother in community for fifty-three years. Firstly as Brother Stephen of the B.H.C. in Peckham, where he helped run a home for delinquent boys and was assistant chaplain at King's College Hospital for many years, and then on the death of the B.H.C. founder, his hero Father George Potter, he became Brother Nicholas S.S.F. in about 1964.

All of the brothers will have their stories of Nicholas, their memories of his little quirks and foibles. I will just give a few impressions of Nicky. Of finding a square of chocolate or a jelly baby sitting on my desk. Of his frustration at times when his face would turn beetroot and his hands strum the table. Of his coming up to me when he knew I was upset or anxious about something and taking my hand and saying 'Bless you'—and toddling off again. Beautiful. Of puzzling for months over those names that were in his room with P.V.H. at the top. They used to change monthly and I couldn't work out those initials. Then having tea with him one day we were talking about a particular situation and he said 'I must put him on my list'. P.V.H. I found stood for Pray Very Hard. I didn't know whether to be flattered or concerned because my name always seemed to be at the top!

Nicky as brother, gentle, always there, cheering, loyal, never intruding—he loved us.

* * *

And as he was a brother so he was a friend. Many have written in testifying simply and movingly to Nicky's capacity to get inside people, to bring a ray of light or warmth into many lives. He had an uncanny knack of being there when it mattered. When we did our survey for Helping Hands in the New Year, at about one house in three we were asked how Brother Nicholas—or the little Brother—was, and this kind of testimony was typical: 'My wife died about six years ago and he came to see me two or three times. It was a help'. It didn't matter to him if they came to church or not, if he could be there he was. That is not to say that the Church wasn't import-

ant to Nicky, it most certainly was. He delighted in worship and seemed more at home in a church building than anyone I have known. Indeed being the Reader here at S. Philips meant a very great deal to him.

So Nicky, as friend, brother, gleaner and Pied Piper, as Eamonn Andrews would say 'This is your life'—or at least your earthly life, and that only a tiny, tiny fraction of this loving, lovable, courteous, funny little man.

Mother Agnes Mary

Born: 21 May, 1895 Professed: 18 May, 1921 Died: 10 July, 1983

Pericles once said, 'The glory of a woman is to have nothing said of her, either in praise or blame'. Mother Agnes Mary would have agreed: in fact, such was her desire for anonymity that she wished her ashes to be poured into the ground so that not even a casket remains to identify her. 'Some there be who have no memorial . . . ' !

It will be a long time, however, before she is forgotten, for she left an indelible impression in the hearts of those who knew her. Little of stature, big in nature; timid yet formidable; knowing how to serve and also to command; fearful of position but carrying her own inimitable authority; she was a character full of opposites held in balance by a peaceful temperament.

There are too many tales even to begin here, and some are told elsewhere; but the real story is the life of a small group of Sisters and her memorial is the Community she helped to build. She has to be read between the lines, a facilitator whose influence allowed rather than initiated, but a determined fighter for what she believed in.

Mother Agnes Mary steered through the post-war patching up of a bomb-damaged convent, the subsequent upheaval of removing to Somerset, the radical changes of the sixties and the growing pains of an expanding community in experimental situations. Every eventuality was faced with a courage born of profound trust in God; and when, at the end of her life the last and most severe testing was in her reduced physical state, that too was endured, though not without a struggle, until her trust was rewarded with release. May she rest in peace.

Correspondence

To the Minister General from the Bishop of Connor

7 October, 1983

Dear Brother Geoffrey,

I usually welcome the arrival of *THE FRANCISCAN*, and I find interest in the chronicle of what the Brothers are doing throughout the world, and in the articles and book reviews. I regret that I have to say that I am gravely disquieted by your letter in the September 1983 edition of *THE FRANCISCAN* in which you give your opinions about 'the Irish problem'. In your letter you state that solutions are found when all sides begin to face the truth. I am concerned that your view of the truth about the tragic situation in Northern Ireland is unbalanced and misinformed, and that the Brothers, near and far, will draw wrongful conclusions from it which will affect their prayers and intercessions for all the people of Northern Ireland. It is particularly unfortunate that your letter should appear at a time when the work of the Society of Saint Francis is expanding in this Diocese with the establishment this month of a House of the Companions of Saint Francis.

Neville Chamberlain described Czechoslovakia in 1938 as a 'far away country of whom we know nothing'. Unfortunately some people in Britain think of Northern Ireland in similar terms. But Northern Ireland is not Vietnam or Zimbabwe or El Salvador or any other far away place. It is part of the United Kingdom and the majority of its one-and-a-half million people wish it to remain so. They are British.

The Provisional IRA wish to change the constitutional position. Its stated aims are to drive the British out and to unite Ireland in one form or another. It seeks to achieve the unity of the people of this island by the use of force. 'One has only to state this fact in all its stark simplicity to see the absurdity of the idea. Who in his sane senses wants to bomb a million Protestants into a united Ireland?' (Joint Statement by Roman Catholic Bishops.) Furthermore, it pursues these aims against the declared wish of the Government of the Republic of Ireland and without a mandate from the Irish people. Violence in Ireland—A Report to the Churches from a working party set up by the Joint Group appointed by the Irish Council of Churches and the Hierarchy of the Roman Catholic Church—includes this statement: 'There is no justification for the campaigns of violence that have characterised the situation in recent years. Violent action, claimed to be "military" on the republican side, has lacked any degree of legitimation as an expression of the national will'.

The truth is these self-styled 'freedom fighters' waging what they call a 'war of liberation' have destroyed any possibility of Irish unity in this generation.

These are the facts which must be faced.

The solution of this complex problem will not come through simplistic, ill-considered initiatives, however well intentioned. It will come through the reconciliation of the two sections of our divided community here, and between the people of Northern Ireland and the Republic.

In the interest of truth, I request that this letter be included in the next edition of *THE FRANCISCAN*, so that the Brothers throughout the world may have a more complete understanding of our problems, and that their prayers and intercessions may be directed aright.

May love and truth prevail.

Yours sincerely in Christ,
✠ WILLIAM CONNOR.

Chronicle

Brother Anselm writes:

EUROPEAN PROVINCE If you began **THE FRANCISCAN** at the beginning by reading the address list, you may have spotted a new one. If you didn't, just have a look. Have you spotted it? Scunthorpe. Scunthorpe?

Yes, Scunthorpe. It's in the Diocese of Lincoln and the County of Humberside. The Minister Provincial (Brother Anselm) and the Provincial Secretary (Brother Christopher) have been sent there by the Provincial Chapter, at the invitation of the Bishop of Lincoln and Scunthorpe clergy. When you read this, we should have moved there. A new S.S.F. house, a new opportunity for ministry—occupied by two brothers who have heavy existing commitments in the Province. That doesn't sound very sensible, so I'd better explain.

Like our Lord, like the church, like sacraments, a religious community is both inward and spiritual, and outward and visible. The gospel, vocation, prayer—these are inward and spiritual. But you (and we) meet the outward signs—the actual sisters and brothers who live in houses of different kinds in different places which relate to human society in different ways. Some houses relate mainly (never exclusively) to what is inward, spiritual and unchanging. They can be regarded as 'permanent'. Others relate closely in a ministry of service to people on the edges of our rapidly changing society. Here, we have to be flexible. There is no point in staying in a house whose purpose has vanished.

Three years ago we listened again, as a world-wide society, to the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. Houses were challenged to renew their vision in the light of the gospel, as our brothers and sisters from other provinces and orders of the Society of S. Francis had helped us to see it at the Conference. The Provincial Chapter identified certain priorities which had found expression in these house discussions, and at the top of the list was: 'The establishment of ministry among the poor, dispossessed, unemployed, of the inner city'.

Scunthorpe is not exactly a city—it is a town whose sixty-five thousand inhabitants depended for a livelihood on one industry, steel manufacture. As a consequence it has changed in five short years from a place of material prosperity, to a pocket of soaring unemployment in which are trapped thousands who cannot afford to move. Thus, it

carries the marks of post-industrial society—which, in their effects on the lives of men, women and children become crippling wounds. The materialist ‘civilisation’ of our age, having degraded human beings to the level of consumer units, now robs them of any significance at all.

We cannot *bring* the gospel to Scunthorpe—the church is there, in all the usual English manifestations. We can in response to the church’s invitation, go there to join people in the search for goals in life to take the place of those which we have taken for granted for too long, and which are fading away. We shall do this in prayer, friendship, service, suffering, joy—we shall be a sign, however little, for the vocation of S.S.F. in today’s world. Pray for Christopher and Anselm, and for the two others who will join them in the course of 1984.

Brother Hugh writes from Mtoni Friary, Dar es Salaam:

One of our guests remarked recently that now she had lived in Tanzania for some time she knew the meaning of *full of beans*! She claimed that she wasn’t referring to the content of our protein diet; but we agreed with her, we feel the same.

We have had a busy guest season this year—started by Brother Anselm with his annual visit. Then came the Bishop Protector, John Eastaugh, fresh from his triumphs at Heathrow where it was claimed that it was his luggage that caused the complete breakdown in the baggage handling system. However we are enormously grateful for his generosity in food, tools, books and equipment that we find hard to get here—and for his kindness and support. We much enjoyed his visit.

The visit of young people of Hereford Diocese’s ‘Tanzania ’83’ expedition overlapped with some of the Bishop’s visit. They were sufficient to fill our refurbished ten-room guesthouse twice over, so half went to visit a leprosarium village while half stayed with us. There was no doubt that Anglo-Tanzanian relations and understanding were much enhanced by the visit and the local football team and the spectators enjoyed matches against an augmented Friary team in which the Hereford girls took part much to the amusement of all.

Once together again the whole party went by train to the Lake Victoria area for more social projects and from there they completed a visit to the Serengeti Game Park during a fuel shortage—in a private bus with four bald tyres—that must merit inclusion in the annals of great tourist endeavour and endurance.

These visits more or less coincided with our citrus harvest which again brought in record takings. Now we are considering irrigation to improve fruit yield and quality and the Irrigation Department has promised to send a survey team.

We have been lucky in all this to have had a good group of brothers here, and one which is now expanding. Amongst the younger brothers our senior postulant has just very commendably revived our ephemeral Sunday School. May it continue! By the time that you read this we hope that he will have become Brother Tito (Titus), as Brother Geoffrey at the time of writing is just about to conduct the novices’ retreat, at the end of which Tito will be clothed in the habit.

Habil (Abel) is not far behind and aspires to long periods in the library which he assures us are spent writing poetry—a favourite Tanzanian pastime. Brother Yakobo, noviced some time ago, has been doubling as cook and tailor, in the latter role using one of the two treadle sewing machines sent to us by Rugby Lions, Warwickshire. We take this opportunity of expressing our thanks for their kindness.

Julius is getting some experience of motor mechanic work in Dar es Salaam. Shephard our Zimbabwe novice, having recently worked at the Kichwele house and done some preaching whilst on safari at Tanga, is due for some home leave. Marko and Marthius, aspirants, are enjoying their stay with us.

So our guest season has continued with a recent Third Order meeting in which six tertiaries were present, and then with a Tertiary Retreat—the first non-brothers' retreat we have had here for some years. Praise the Lord!

We now await the arrival of Brother Edmund to join us. Alnmouth's loss may be our gain but as another of our friends said the other day, he won't need to install a central heating system in Dar es Salaam.

Brother Brian writes:

AUSTRALIA AND

NEW ZEALAND PROVINCE

Philip, Nigel and Warrington are familiar christian names among Papuan men. They have been named

after Archbishop Sir Philip Nigel Warrington Strong who was Bishop of New Guinea from 1936 to 1962 and Archbishop of Brisbane 1963 to 1970, the latter three years being also Primate of the Church of England in Australia as it was then called. He was of course the person who invited the First Order of the Society of Saint Francis both to Papua New Guinea and to Australia. He was the first Protector of what became the Pacific Province. On 6 July, 1983 he died at Wangaratta, having celebrated the eucharist that morning, and having lived in the Cathedral Close since his retirement, continuing his vigorous ministry of prayer, preaching and letter writing to the end. He was buried following a joyous eucharist of thanksgiving in the Cathedral on what would have been his eighty-fourth birthday. The last of our friars to see him was Gerard, a native of Wangaratta, who had visited him a few days before. Many are the stories of this loving and lovable eccentric whose total abandonment to God was plain for all to see. Some would say he was a definite saint—bishop and confessor! He was a great champion for the religious life in the Anglican Communion. And the Society is full of gratitude to God for having had such a Protector who in some sense was the founder of S.S.F. in the Pacific. To some of us he was very similar to Father Algy: in the early days of their ordained ministry both had been nurtured by that strong brand of evangelical catholicism which has for long been a feature of north-east England.

Vincent, Dominic and Peter are the names of three refugees from Vietnam now living at the friary at Brookfield, Brisbane. They give to the friary a dimension of life which could be so easily ignored or forgotten; for in their suffering they have left behind some of their closest relatives and friends. Vincent, a former secondary school teacher, escaped from a prisoner-of-war camp, his wife and children still in Vietnam. Dominic was a seminarian and Peter, aged ten, has his parents still in Vietnam and his sister in Malaysia. The friary has sponsored them to begin a new life in Australia, and consequently the brothers are receiving from them as much as they are providing. With the help of Brother Alan Barnabas they have formed themselves into a group called the New Life Woodcarvers selling their Vietnamese articles, made in the friary, in a little shop alongside the friary pottery shop. Happily their Vietnamese friends visit the friary on weekends and sometimes feed the friary family on their home-cooking. How important it is in Australia that the peoples of different cultures meet and share!

The Brookfield friary is being used increasingly for retreats and other gatherings. In the course of five weeks during September and October there came a group of boys from Southport School, followed by a group of university students with their chaplain for a weekend; then there was a weekend youth retreat followed by a clergy retreat. Nevertheless the brothers are looking further ahead to ministry in the city which will probably begin in a small way among unemployed youth in association with Holy Trinity Church, Fortitude Valley. Meanwhile our involvement in the early morning city coffee-brigade, for people who have spent the night on the streets or in parks, has increased.

From Brookfield, Brothers Wayne and Howard have been to Sydney to participate in the National Anglican Evangelical Conference at which their presence was particularly appreciated. Howard has also participated in a national conference of Anglican welfare agencies. Brian has been to Sydney to represent the Society at the Commissioning of the Protector, Bishop Ken Mason, as Chairman of the Australian Board of Missions, in S. Andrew's Cathedral. All these were Anglican family occasions when old friends across this vast country met again and new friendships were made in the name of the Lord. In 1984, apart from a programme of missions and retreats in various states, brothers will also be visiting some theological colleges to talk about the religious

life. The nurturing of vocations depends very much upon the encouragement of well-informed parish clergy.

This magazine often records the transfer of brothers and the opening and closing of houses. This edition may be unique in announcing the proposed transportation of a whole friary! The Parnell friary in Auckland is the old Deanery, still belonging to the Cathedral Council. Already the former wooden cathedral of S. Mary has been transferred across the road to stand alongside the half-finished new cathedral of the Holy Trinity. And now the former Deanery is to be moved to a new site in St. Stephen's Avenue where it will continue to be the friary. Both are handsome wooden buildings. We don't quite know when this is to happen but the thought of it creates a number of mental pictures including one of the present guardian sitting in the smallest room on the only seat absorbing the *Reader's Digest* only to find that he is facing in the opposite direction when he has finished!

Brother Daniel is now in charge of the new house at Otara helped by George and two novices. Three aspirants are expected to join us in Parnell within the next few months and the Brookfield friary is expecting a secondary school teacher from South Australia at the end of February.

Religious houses tend always to have an ongoing ministry to individuals, often unknown. All our friaries, and the Sisters' guest house at Stroud, have a continual stream of people coming to them. Among these are sometimes those preparing for ordination to the priesthood and consecration to the episcopate. Isaac Gadebo spent a month in the Hermitage at Stroud during his ten week preparation for consecration as Bishop of Port Moresby. Peter Atkins also came to Australia from New Zealand and spent a month at Brookfield, preparing for his consecration as Bishop of Waiupu.

William Lash writes:

It was when Tony (T.O.) and I set out from Thursday Island to Cairns on 21 March, 1983, that I fully realised the importance of Flight Plans. The Island is the administrative centre of the Torres Straits, beyond the northern tip of Australia. After a full week-end we had to ferry to Horn Island for the airfield. On the brief voyage the Flight Plan was found to have been left behind in the truck which took us to the quay. What a gefuffle! What frantic phoning, and speedboating across the narrow seas! Without it we were earthbound.

Once our one-engined plane was in the air, all was calm, though to the west of us storm clouds raged above the peninsula. We flew in clear weather across the sea.

The Great Barrier Reef, 'earth's largest living thing' (slogan on T shirts), like giant stepping stones, marched southward on our left.

From departure in October 1981, till return in August 1983, everywhere I went, I found the Brookfield Friary had already ceased to be centred round rampageous found the Brookfield Friary had already ceased to be centred round rumpageous lads, euphemistically called 'guests'. It was being rehabilitated and re-ordered for the fostering of the life, and for provision of a place to which many could come, and had begun to come, in groups or individually, for quiet in the ample grounds, and for worship in the pleasant octagonal chapel on the hill's brow.

While I was departing, in May 1983, The Provincial Chapter, in Auckland, New Zealand, was deciding to give up the work of looking after adolescents in care, at Taringa, for a more fluid work among waifs drifting into the inner city. Further work was being considered—perhaps in Northern Queensland, over which I had flown, among the Torres Strait Islanders and the Aborigines—perhaps a second entry into New South Wales nearer to Sydney, where an evangelical concern for spirituality is emerging; or even further south.

Over Christmas 1982 I spent a happy month in our Auckland Friary. Before I left, a new 'house' was opening in Otara, to the south of the city, in a low cost housing area, where low economics folk, many island immigrants, had come to live.

On arrival in San Francisco, at the end of May 1983, I found a year of novice training just ending, in San Damiano Friary, for a delightfully varied group of novices; suggestive of fresh ventures for the future. Two visits north to the Bishop's Ranch, one fairly quiet and the other rather hectic, including the second of my three experiences of Tertiary convocations, gave me a glimpse of that lovely spot, just before it was to be handed back, after ten years of strenuous work, to the diocese. Already a 'Flight Plan' was on foot for a new centre and new work elsewhere in San Francisco, now located on 40th Avenue.

I crossed the States via Minneapolis and Chicago (third T.O. convocation) to Long Island. On the eastern side I found everyone teeming with expectation.

Returning 'home' I found Canterbury and Llandudno already closed, and the move made from Toynbee Hall to Halcrow Street. Scunthorpe soon appeared above the horizon, and sent us scurrying for maps to find out just where on earth it is. Southern Africa's call was growing insistent. Two sisters were soon to sally forth, like harbingers, to Zimbabwe.

In every Province I was struck by our mixture of natives and expatriates. Some of these had been deliberately sent to help to establish the life. Some were 'on loan'. Some had heard the call, while away from home. Others simply had to find fulfilment of a vocation elsewhere, since the life was not yet available in their own country. We amply share the vast uprooting and dispersal of humanity about the world.

Humankind has struck its tents and is on the march, often by air. Storm clouds rage on one side and giant reefs lurk on another. Only God knows where we are going. Perhaps He will drop us some hints so that we can help guide our fellow pilgrims on the Way.

Sister Ruth writes:

AMERICAN PROVINCE On 7 September, Diane Dresskell, Mary McClellan, Karen Hummer and Kirk Harris were noviced in the chapel at S. Francis House as Sisters Anne, Mary Margaret and Anna Elizabeth and Brother Kirk. That evening the brothers and sisters in the city met together for a party to celebrate the novicing and to wish Cecilia *Bon Voyage*. She left the next day en route for three months in Zimbabwe, where she and Sister Jean are staying with the Community of the Holy Transfiguration. It is a great joy for our province to be in a position to loan our sisters in areas of need.

After completing their intensive study year of the novitiate, Susanne Elizabeth and Sandra Kay have moved on to new situations. Susanne is spending six months in England, contrasting a British and a California winter! Sandra is living in the new house in the city and continuing her nursing work.

Sister Catherine Joy has been accepted as a candidate for the priesthood. She hopes to do her final year of study at General Seminary, in New York, beginning in September 1984. Alongside her studies, she continues as full-time port chaplain, assisted by former brother Norman Strong.

In October, Pamela was very involved in an Interfaith Peace Festival which was held at Grace Cathedral. She also kept up a constant and active concern for those local people involved in the Fast for Life. The fast was ended in California on 15 September, with the fasters feeling that a significant step forward for peace had been achieved.

As this is being written, our playful city of S. Francis is buzzing with Halloween activities, and the most wonderful costumes are being paraded through the streets. S. Francis House has been a hive of activity as we prepare our disguises for the Halloween party at San Damiano Friary.

Loving greetings from us all.

On 12 September, 1983, Pope John Paul II visited the United Nations 'Citadel' in Vienna, Austria. Speaking to the management and personnel of the U.N. he said: 'The ideals of the Poverello construct a ring of coming together for all generations, because they unite women and men of good will, for all centuries, in their seeking peace and reciprocal aid . . . '.

Reported in FRATERNITAS for October 1983.

Bands of Love

Sermon preached by Brother Michael at the celebration of Brother Denis' golden jubilee of ordination.

Hosea 11: 4. 'I drew them with the cords of a man, with bands of love; and I was to them as they that take off the yoke on their jaws; and I laid meat before them'.

W. H. Auden, writing about A. E. Housman says:

'No one, not even Cambridge, was to blame (Blame if you like the human situation)'.

CERTAINLY the human situation cannot be avoided and, for Denis as for Housman, it was Cambridge which gave it a historical location. In some recent biographies and autobiographies—Owen Chadwick on Hensley Henson (surely one of the most discriminatingly careful and caring reflections on another man's life), Harry Williams and Mervyn Stockwood on themselves (and quite a lot of other people as well), some stars shine out in the Cambridge firmament a little more brightly than others. Some stars, indeed, are suns which, like our Brother the Sun, blazing, give life to others. So BK—that is B. K. Cunningham—gave life to Algy, and Algy gave life to Denis, and Denis gave life to a great many, some of whom are here today.

Of course, it is a part of the greater plan of God, the miraculous maze in which we all wander towards our ultimate goal, faltering, failing, finding new avenues, turning new corners or caged in cul-de-sacs, confronted suddenly with a familiar face, and exclaiming,—'So you are here as well!'.

Over forty years ago, during the war, and, for all my apparent sophistication, remarkably innocent of the wiles of the Church and the World, I was lured (as a very willing victim) to live at S. Francis House, Lady Margaret Road, Cambridge. The evening was grey, and when I rang the bell it seemed an interminable age before anyone came to the door, which suddenly opened, and there before me was a tall, rather forbidding, figure, dramatically draped in a sweeping brown cloak. This was Father Denis; to me, at twenty-two, I suppose, a romantic reality—though, so far as he was concerned, he merely had a very bad cold! We crouched in long cane chairs over an inadequate gas fire, surrounded by faded pictures of Tractarian worthies, and I agreed—how eagerly I agreed—to go and live there. That was a mysterious, magical, and sometimes terrifyingly miserable year, hearing about the love of God and man, of which I thought I knew everything, but, in fact, knew less than nothing. Many of the names in the books came to the house. Gillet, Smythe, Raven, Alec Vidler and the Maycocks, the lovable and holy Edward Wynne, the endearing Frances Cornford; undergraduates, too, like Freddie Lindars and Geoffrey Pearson—and, later, so many more that, at one time, almost the entire Chapter of S.S.F. had this one thing in common—S. Francis House, Cambridge—though no-one, not even Cambridge, was to blame.

Of course they were not all drawn by Denis, any more than we are, any one of us, drawn anywhere by one man alone. Let us say, rather, that they were all drawn by

God, and by the one man, Jesus Christ our Lord, who places upon himself no restrictions or limitations, and yet embraced 'the human situation' in His determination that He should draw all men to Himself. Who, as He delights in the sons of men, shares with us that particularity which is the very essence of incarnational theology. A theology of places and persons, as well as Divine providence and purpose which, beginning at Bethlehem, fixes us firmly into a pattern of personal discipleship that, making us one with Him, unites us also with Cuthbert in Northumbria, Francis in Assisi, and all of us here at that point in time when we first recognise Him in love. The liberating reality of a love in Christ which is, with infinite diversity, both more human than humanity normally allows or even imagines possible, and, at the same time, a participation in that Divinity of Love which flows from God alone.

Jesus said, 'I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men to myself'. 'And for our life He died'. To that end, He will use everything in us. All the fixed motives of the past, the longing to please others, fulfil their hopes for us, to be 'a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek', to succeed, to be a friar; to create a friary, command a Community; to be admired, to be modest; to be free from fear or failure, hope or happiness; to be penitent, to be prayerful; all these are the human bonds which He uses to draw us to Himself.

And, because we are alone yet never alone, we live out our loneliness living in love with others, in particular places and with particular people. To envy others' places, other people, is to lose not only living, but life itself. To strain *against* the gentle tension of the bonds that bind us to the Lord Himself, drawing us inexorably into the Kingdom of His Eternity, is to demand the impossible—another time, another place.

'So many try to say "Not now"
 So many have forgotten how
 To say "I AM", and would be
 Lost, if they could, in history.
 No wonder that so many die of grief
 So many are so lonely as they die
 No-one has yet believed or liked a lie;
 "Another Time" has other lives to lead'.

Where is this 'I AM' to be found in the life of a Priest?

Perhaps nothing is more certainly true of the present, the 'Now' rather than the 'Not Now', the 'I am' of each one of us made in the image of the eternal I AM, than those particular moments of sacramental truth entrusted to priests; firstly, the certainties of that moment to which we belong when we are assured that our sins are forgiven; and, secondly, the I AM continually present with us in the visible mystery of bread and wine.

We live in a time of terrible peril, not merely from the abuse of atomic power or alcohol, or the abuse of passion and violence, but the diminishment of our stature as men made to acknowledge and share in the mysteries of God. Really great men, of whom there are only a few at any time, know that, with all our knowledge, we still only stand on the outward edges of understanding, of perception, of truth. To be truly in Love, to live in Love, is to be drawn into the mystery of unknowing, to be engaged in an encounter with the mystery of Godhead, to stand on holy ground.

How can we know the nature of sin unless we acknowledge the mystery of God? How can we know the liberating power of reconciliation, of forgiveness? 'To ease the yoke from their jaws' says Hosea—and what the priest says, under this mercy, is 'by His authority committed unto me I absolve you from all your sins. Go in peace, the Lord has put away your sins, and pray for me, a sinner too'. *That* is to fulfil a mystery of priesthood. We dimly know why, but I am tentative if you ask me how. Perhaps, after fifty years, a priest might say, 'in faithfulness to this love, I found freedom to *be* a priest'.

And it is this same freedom that permits him to draw us into the Holy of Holies where the love lifted up, once for all, on the Cross, to draw us with certain bonds, is for ever offered in love in that eternal communion of the Triune Godhead, realised on earth in the particular reality of this place and time, this bread and wine, even here and now in Alnmouth.

Well, as we always sang at the Wooler Camp, 'Tis good, Lord, to be here, Thy glory fills the sky'. And the time now for us all is a time which declares a Jubilee. I looked it all up in Leviticus, but felt too daunted by the prospect of present company to try and apply what I found there to the present moment!

Rather, I recalled that S. Francis House had a former glory as 'The Oratory of The Good Shepherd', and that its former patron had been Nicholas Ferrar, another Cambridge man, and founder of all that was to be found at Little Gidding. During that first year in S. Francis House, Eliot's poem was published. I remember getting a copy at Heffer's for a shilling. Perhaps our Jubilee declares that under the shadow of the Good Shepherd some unlikely men discovered the mercy of God in a ministry which, for half a century, has reflected that timelessness of love which Eliot sought to capture.

'Let me disclose the gifts reserved for age.
To set a crown upon your lifetime's effort'.

'A people without history is not redeemed
from time, for history is a pattern of
timeless moments'.

'With the drawing of this Love and the
voice of this calling

'We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time'.

Radio Forth, a local radio station, recently broadcast a programme about Saint Francis and his relevance for our time. Simeon, Ian and Peter Douglas and Tertiary Anne Weatherall all took part in this, together with a Roman Catholic Franciscan and a Brother from the Roslin Community.

Christianity and The New Age

BY DONALD REEVES



THIS article examines the opportunities for the Churches presented by the steady and persistent growth of new religious movements. The World Christian Encyclopaedia reveals the extent of this phenomenon: ninety-six million people belong to them; by the end of the century they will have more adherents than the Orthodox Church, and already outnumber the Anglican Communion by over a third. Moreover there is evidence in the U.S.A. that these new religions are more successful at winning converts from the unchurched than the main line institutional churches.

Under the flag of the new religious movements gather an astonishing collection of groups, sects, cults and churches. There are the alternative Protestant evangelical, fundamentalist sects; there are the cults like the Moonies and the Scientologists who are in the news for their brain-washing activities. There are the gurus like Rajneesh, whose Bhaguan movement is one of the most successful and whose eclecticism embraces almost every philosophy and creed. There are the Oriental religions—Zen, Islam, Sufism, Hinduism and Buddhism, which are now successfully transplanted in the West—for westerners. There are the quasi-religious therapy groups based on the Human Potential movement and forms of trans-personal humanistic psychology. And there are those almost professional religious explorers who collect religious experiences (they can be much at risk—tampering with secret teachings without guidance).

It should not therefore be surprising that if a church—one minute from Piccadilly Circus—offers its understanding of Christian faith and practice as a journey, exploration, or pilgrimage, then all sorts of people will gather for conversations, seminars, lectures and workshops. Some of those groups will not of course be welcome: any group which aims to destroy people's basic liberties has to be fearlessly exposed for the dangerous counterfeits they are.

Others like the fundamentalist, Protestant sects may come and go—usually in righteous indignation (little knowing that they mirror many of the characteristics of the groups whom they attack so viciously). But those who are particularly welcome are some who have begun to find a

home in one of the neo-Oriental religions, human potential movements, or just those who are confused and lost in their search for faith.

Sociologists of religion differ among themselves as to the significance of new religions. If they believe that religion is an outmoded way of interpreting reality, that it is just a defence mechanism, just conceals class interests or is just illusory in emphasising free will, then they will understand them as yet another example of its trivialisation: for all their apparent vigour, they are nothing more than exotic consumer items—and witnesses to the failure of religion to influence economic, social and political realities. On the other hand, those who see the significance of these new movements as part of a colossal shift in the perception of reality, brought about by the disintegration of the values of Western scientific materialism, come to a quite different conclusion. It is because sociologists of religion underestimate this new paradigm (of which new religions are just a part) that they seem to me to be wrong in interpreting new religions as merely part of the inevitable process of secularisation.

Therefore although we are concerned primarily with the Church's response to some of the new religions, it is necessary, however badly, to rehearse the argument about this radical shift in perception. 'We are', as Samuel Beckett has said, 'between a death and a difficult birth'. The death is that of the conventional wisdom of the world which explains everything in mechanistic and materialistic terms. Its roots lie in the philosophy of Descartes. It says—to put it too simply—the world of matter is there to be observed and used. Man stands apart from the world, manipulating and exploiting it. He sees himself as a fragmented being where the mind and the spirit are 'detached' from the body. The body is something to be understood and ordered about; it is perceived as a mere chemical system or material thing. Western civilisation based on this view of the world has suffered incalculable damage: the fragmentation and conflicts at the personal, public, national and international levels are the inevitable consequences of this view of life. Religion and the arts have blindly acquiesced, and have nearly died in the process. The only hope for our planet, so the argument goes, is painstakingly, consciously, imaginatively and rigorously to recover the understanding of the interdependence of mind, body and spirit and of the mutuality of men and women with one another and with nature. A passionate, consuming search for wholeness and holiness is called for to manifest this interdependence and mutuality in a broken

world. Such is then the one common feature of the New Age people and of those seeking 'alternatives' in every aspect of experience and living. Schumacher, who would not incidentally have identified with any of the New Age religions, put it like this:

'I think we can see the conflict of attitudes which will decide our future. On the one side, I see the people who think they can cope with our economic, technological crises by the methods current, only more so; I call them the people of the forward stampede. On the other side, there are people in search of a new life-style who seek to return to basic truths about man and his world; I call them home-comers. The people of the forward stampede, like the devil, have all the best tunes . . . You cannot stand still, they say . . . You must go forward: there is nothing wrong with modern technology except that it is as yet incomplete . . . There are no insoluble problems . . . "A breakthrough a day keeps the crisis at bay". And what about the other side? This is made up of people who are deeply convinced that the technological development has taken a wrong turn and needs to be redirected. The term "home-comer" has a religious connotation. It takes a good deal of courage to say "no" to the fashions and fascinations of the age, and to question the presuppositions of a civilisation which appears destined to conquer the world. The requisite strength can only be derived from deep convictions . . .

'Everybody will have to take sides in this great conflict. To "leave it to the experts" means to side with people of the forward stampede. It is widely accepted that politics is too important a matter to be left to the experts. . . . neither can economics and technology'. (*Small is Beautiful*.)

A common feature of the New Religions is their understanding that we are living at the end of an age; and that they, too, are called to be 'homecomers'. The content of their belief and practice varies considerably (it is foolish, for example, to put the Hare Krishna on the same level with the disciplined and ancient traditions of the Eastern religions). But it is possible to identify some common characteristics.

There is the desire for an intense, decisive, spiritual experience which will offer a moment of peace, harmony, bliss and ecstasy—often described as a transformation of consciousness. To know oneself is to know the God within, so it is claimed. Spirituality addresses itself to the study of the feminine principle, the exploration of the psyche and the interpretation of dreams. The knowledge that is given and experienced is that of the essential unity and oneness of everything. The

stress is on communion and harmony. It avoids abstract reasoning, ideas and analysis. It is about illumination, not actions, about experience not commitment, about the experience of the 'here and now' not about plotting the future. Moments of mystical unity are greatly treasured; thus the physicist Fritjof Capra, recalling sitting by the sea on a late summer afternoon, watching the movement of the waves and feeling the rhythm of his breathing, suddenly experiences the whole universe as a cosmic dance:

'I "saw" cascades of energy coming down from outer space in which particles were created and destroyed in rhythmic pulses. I "saw" the atoms of the elements and those of my body participating in this cosmic dance of energy: I felt its rhythms, and I heard its sound, and at that moment I knew this was the Dance of Shiva'.

The way this transformation is affected and these experiences are made available is through techniques of meditation, breathing, yoga, the chanting of mantras, special diets and fasting, movement and dance.

This longing for spiritual knowledge and experience frequently leads to perceptions of the world as a prison from which the soul needs to escape and burst free, so belief in reincarnation and spiritualism are prominent.

In the search for this 'experiential' religion, there has to be a supportive community led by a teacher who unlocks the door to this new world and by his or her own practice provides a living witness of this secret knowledge.

How should the Church respond to these strange and ancient teachings? Anathema is one response: All these beliefs and practices are of Satan; they are the work of the Anti-Christ. Since they are spiritual counterfeit, Christians should do everything in their power to destroy them, and preserve the purity of their own faith. This view rejects any sort of outright mysticism; it denies that any sort of salvation can be found outside their own understanding of the truth. Extreme as this position is, such groups have one useful function: they provide an early warning system for those who might be persuaded to join those particular cults or sects which seek to possess a person's soul. A polemical response is another: since many of the New Religions are the expressions of the ancient, pagan gnosticism and since this is incompatible with Christianity, then the Churches should ignore them. It is, however, just too simple to reduce all these movements to gnos-

ticism, and anyhow the main line Churches cannot afford to remain aloof from what is by now an established religious movement.

The only way to approach new religions—particularly those which are concerned with transformation of consciousness, spiritual enlightenment and the pop psychology of much of the human potential movement—is to welcome them. In two and a half years, I have had conversations with some thirty people, many of them extended, and on several occasions or in great depth with those who come from the new religious movements. It has been a salutary experience. Without exception, these people had a conventional Christian upbringing, and their stories resounded with a sense of being let down by their church. A typical story goes like this:

‘ Well, I was brought up in the Church of England—christened, and confirmed when I was twelve. But as I grew older it didn’t meet any of my needs. The services were so boring; nothing ever happened. We were always being asked to raise money. The vicar looked harrowed and worried, and when I tried once to ask him some questions he just looked nervous. There were so many words, exhortations and complicated ideas to grasp. I wanted to have some experience of all these things we were hearing about. It was all a bit like school—so after a bit I left ’.

For whatever other reason the churches should welcome back those who have felt cheated or betrayed. And the welcome is given in a spirit of penitence. For our part we should be ready to say:

‘ In the name of God we welcome you—just as you are. We are sorry, deeply sorry that your own journey to faith was prevented by your experience of the Christian Church. So welcome—share with us your discoveries on your own journey, and then let us, when the time is right, share with you those experiences, insights and teachings from the Christian tradition once denied to you ’.

The welcome is unqualified. The prompting which sets people off in search of faith is to be respected and cherished. And to listen with sensitivity and attention is to prompt a silent dialogue within the listener. What is it that we in the main line churches have lost or forgotten and what is it that we have to recover from our tradition to meet the challenge of the new religions? And any consideration of these questions is not in the direction of some vague syncretism (‘ we are all the same really ’) but in the recovery of a radical Christian

orthodoxy; the task is to note the similarities and differences and to explore them in as much depth and imagination as possible. Such is the true, ecumenical approach.

Christian churches have to search within their own history and traditions for a genuine Christian gnostic and esoteric tradition. This means the establishment of schools of prayer, the recovery of practices of prayer and meditation led by authorised teachers who have themselves an authentic charisma. Such 'schools' will be open to all, but much would be required of those who join. And the teachings would be Christian in the sense that the 'knowledge' that is revealed, shared and experienced is that revealed by God in Jesus Christ. The experience of such 'knowing' is not just of personal transformation or of harmony with the universe (though these states may be a necessary part of the journey for some) but that of being able to see with the eyes of God, open to a world of much turbulence, oppression and injustice. It is a practice of mysticism which is open not just to the self or God in the self but to God in the world.

Thus the Christian offering to the 'new' religions is that of the Incarnation—of the 'Word made flesh'. The fact of evil, the presence of suffering—history itself—these are not to be bypassed, ignored or transcended, for history, and never more than in our day, is where the creating presence of a loving, suffering and gracious God is found. Such a discernment of God-in-the-world restores a true understanding of the sacraments and of the 'materialism' of Christianity. To see with the eyes of God, to be open to God, is to see God with us and for us in suffering and dereliction, as well as in the hope of salvation and redemption. Are there in our traditions proper Christian esoteric, gnostic and accessible teachings which can assist us in this formation?

The gift of the Incarnation is not all. The Christian has to resist the all pervasive narcissism which is such a feature of the new religions—particularly of the quasi-religious therapies. Self discovery, self healing, self development—all designed to secure inner peace, are in no way consonant with the biblical understanding of the Kingdom of God as the transformation of individuals, the social order and of the whole creation. Moreover, narcissism breeds apathy and passivity which could if it became widespread be a threat to the political process of democracy and collude with a currently fashionable view that the capacity for social change and the creation of community cannot be developed collectively.

Ministry of this frontier nature is a risk. It is easily misunderstood; it is open to abuse. It does not yield obvious or immediate results, and it is not clear as to what 'results' there should be, although some whose indifference to Christianity was once quite marked have expressed gratitude and relief and have sought to renew their baptismal vows. But if churches as part of their mission rightly seek to contribute a Christian voice to political and economic issues, then they should not be blind to the 'new' religions in their midst which could unawares and quietly undermine their already fragile presence.

Donald Reeves is Rector of S. James', Piccadilly.

The Mark of Cain:

race, reconciliation and justice

BY KENNETH LEECH



I NOTICED, when I was asked to write this piece, that the last time I wrote on the same subject for THE FRANCISCAN was twenty years ago, in 1963. To consider how the scene has changed since then should help us to understand our present climate and future prospects.

Such a project should be of particular concern to Franciscans. Several members of S.S.F., notably the late Brother Neville, played an important role in creating links of friendship and help with many of the New Commonwealth immigrants in East London after 1945. The bad image of the Cable Street district was a significant element in the media campaign to discredit the emerging black community and which helped to promote the restrictive legislation of 1962. In the same period, Bernard Ball, then a member of the Brotherhood of the Holy Cross, was playing a vital role in the Moss Side area of Manchester. My own early involvement with issues of racism and radical justice was largely the result of being born not far from Moss Side, and of working at the Cable Street house between 1958 and 1963.

1958 was the year of the riots in Notting Dale in West London. At the time, Lord Salmon, in sentencing some of the rioters, described them as a small and insignificant section of the community. The riots

occurred at a time of low black immigration, in a district with few black people, and those involved came from areas which were almost wholly white. They were followed by immediate demands for control of immigration—‘irrespective of race, colour or creed’ as even the late Sir Cyril Osborne felt it necessary to say. (Everyone knew that it was black immigrants which was entirely the focus of concern, but in those days even very right-wing racists felt it necessary to modify their language.) The Commonwealth Immigrants Act was the conclusion of a campaign which began before 1958, was intensified by the riots, and can be said to be the principal governmental response to organised racism. Compared with the half-heartedness and lack of enthusiasm with which successive governments have implemented race relations and anti-discrimination legislation, the vigour and intensity by which the immigration laws have been administered is very striking indeed. The theory was that racism at the doors of Britain was necessary to achieve racial harmony within Britain.

Twenty-five years after the 1958 riots, several major changes are evident. The black community is now an important and sizeable element in the British population. While most immigrants are not black (and never have been), most blacks now are not immigrants. These facts have never prevented both politicians and press from referring to ‘immigrants’ as if they were mainly black people, and to black people as if they were all immigrants. Today, the black community, while still small in percentage terms, is a significant minority in Britain’s society, a minority which is becoming increasingly organized and capable of corporate action. On the other hand, the evidence of racism in employment, education and housing as well as in immigration control itself, is overwhelming and continuously documented. There is little evidence to support the view that it is significantly declining, and the relationship between the facts and change is often an inverse relationship. False stereotypes and mistaken views are prevalent and often determine policy.

The most significant change since 1958 is that, far from being the behaviour of an insignificant minority, racism is now institutionalised: built into legislation, embodied in the bureaucracy, an integral part of our political organisation. It is genteel British racism, less crude than in many other countries, equally destructive, stubbornly resistant to change. While racism is not the peculiar possession of any one party, in recent years it has become more and more respectable within the

Conservative Party, as groups and tendencies which had been disapproved of and marginalised in the days of Heath and Macmillan are now finding that they can breathe and survive more easily in the air of Thatcherism. So one is not surprised to find the political editor of the *Daily Mail* (9 November, 1981) saying that 'the time has come to make a stand in favour of racialism', or that leaders of the influential Peterhouse school of Cambridge Tories should be urging the retrospective removal of the legal status of black people (cf. John Casey in *Salisbury Review*, Autumn 1982).

Today's racist ideology appeals less to ideas of superiority (though many still hold such ideas) as to the theme of the unity of the nation and its resistance to an 'alien wedge'. The Falkland Islands campaign strengthened this image of a unified British identity which includes the Falkland Islanders more than it includes black and Asian people here. After all, as Mrs. Thatcher said, we are a nation which ruled an Empire: but black people were *ruled by* that nation! So we now have a British Nationality Act which effectively undermines the security and identity of black British people. Even the *Economist* (2 August, 1980) spoke of 'the increasing racial loading of the concept of British citizenship'. Meanwhile the government which claims to stand for the family continually splits up families through the operation of the immigration rules, while passport checks and police harassment are part of the common experience of black people.

The Church, in this very serious situation, has more than a pastoral role. Back in the 40s and 50s, it was possible to argue that things would go well with a little bit of goodwill and tolerance. Today the monster of racism is securely established in the corridors of power. A 'non-political' quest for racial harmony is not viable or possible. The Church is called to re-learn the truths that reconciliation is not possible without truth and justice; that the word of God is often heard in conflict and social upheaval; and that fidelity to God's will is manifested in concern for the alien, the orphan and the widow. It is called to assert positively the non-racist and anti-racist character of its Gospel, and in so doing it will learn the meaning of the Gospel saying that a man's foes will be those of his own household. For racism goes deep into the Church's life too, and judgement must therefore begin with the house of God.

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Hope and The Holocaust

BY MARK MILLS-POWELL

' We were surrounded by dark brown smoke, which was accompanied by a roaring sound as if the ground had been split in two. We could not see even an inch ahead. I found myself thrown back about ten metres and to the ground. Five minutes, maybe almost ten passed before it became faintly light around us. Looking around I found the school-house totally flattened and my class-mates lying here and there on the ground.

For a while I was not aware of anything at all; I stood absentmindedly, and then I looked at my body. The skin of my arms and legs was peeling off just like shreds of cloth, and I could see red flesh. The palms of my hands developed blisters just like the belly of a globe-fish; my skin had turned yellow . . . '

' The Day the Bomb Hit:
A Hiroshima A-Bomb Survivor Remembers '
from *Waging Peace* 1



SO writes Akihiro Takahashi, victim of the A-bomb explosion on Hiroshima (6 August, 1945). Will his fate become all of ours?

What ground is there for hope as the nuclear arsenals increase, and the relationship between the Soviet Union and the U.S.A. seems to deteriorate? The recent Korean airline tragedy has reminded us all how volatile our situation is, how easily fear can take control, how great the damage that can be done. One wonders why the lethal capability of the Hiroshima bomb (13 kilotons of explosive power, killing 130,000 people instantaneously) was too small for the human race; why we have had to, since then, increase by 853,000 times our power to destroy the world until we possess, as we now do, the equivalent of two tons of dynamite for every person on our planet?

Why the fascination with death, and more importantly, what power do we have, as Christians, to combat it? Can we set ourselves free from this downward spiral? Or is it inevitable that the first words of God's judgment on the human race, ' When you eat of that fruit, you shall surely die ', will have their final fulfilment in mass, global suicide? What hope is there for us?

Some Christians believe that we should not resist the holocaust, that it is part of God's cosmic plan, foretold in the Book of Revelation. They would have a hope in the inevitability of nuclear extinction as a

fulfilment; Christ as the omega. This approach is not far removed from Stuart Blanch's speech, given as Archbishop of York, in the General Synod debate on the 'Church and the Bomb' in February. He quoted Luke 21: 28: 'Lift up your heads, for your redemption draws near'. The early Christians did not just fear the end of the world, he asserted, but welcomed the prospect with faith in God. When speculation about the end times is as prevalent as it is today (evidenced by the extraordinary circulation of Hal Lindsay's best-sellers), this approach is buttressed by something deep in the popular psyche. The end becomes engrossing, and almost enticing: no longer to be held in awe and dread.

However, a tragic confusion exists in this: nuclear holocaust and Christ's return are two events which could hardly be more different. They symbolize opposite realities: the rule of death and the rule of the life-giver. The New Testament commands us to ready ourselves to the unexpected advent of our Lord, 'as a thief in the night', by alert wakefulness and vigilant prayer, not by fueling the fires of massive destruction and tempting extinction. The church, as the Bride of Christ, must be preoccupied in loving adoration, eagerly awaiting the Groom's entrance, not flirting in the powerful presence of a leopard-like creature, whose feet resemble a bear's and whose mouth opens like a lion's (Rev. 13: 2). Christ will return as king, triumphant and in glory. His reign will supplant every earthly ruler. 'By (his) light shall the nations walk; and the kings of the earth shall bring their glory to (him)' (Rev. 21: 24). But in the nuclear holocaust, Jesus Christ is the central victim. Even as he hungers with the hungry, thirsts with the thirsty, is estranged with the stranger, is stripped with the naked, ails with the sick, and is imprisoned with the prisoner (Mt. 25: 35 ff.); so his skin is peeled back in the heat of nuclear explosion, his hands develop blisters and burn as the bloody flesh beneath is exposed, his Body is set alight. He is disfigured as are all the nuclear victims, born and unborn. He is crucified afresh.

'On a ruined wall in Hiroshima is dimly etched the figure of a human being who was standing next to it when the flash came. The body, though instantaneously vaporized, stopped enough of the awful light to leave that abiding epitaph. When German theologian Heinrich Vogel gazed at the dim silhouette, the thought gripped him: Jesus Christ was there in the inferno with that person; what was done to him was done to Christ; the horror he had no time to experience, Jesus felt. The Light of the world stood uncomprehended, comprehending, and undone by the hideous splendor of man's stolen fire'.²

Strangely, it is precisely here that we can find grounds for reassurance, because nuclear holocaust is the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. No life, no death, nothing in all creation is so terrible as to be outside the domain of Christ's death and resurrection. 'What shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? . . . I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else at all, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord' (Rom. 8: 35, 38 ff.). Not even the oblivion of nuclear desecration, nor any death, however grotesque and ugly the forms in which it parades itself; none are beyond the sphere of Christ's redemptive work on the cross. He has already entered into the horror of every victim of disaster, including nuclear destruction. 'It is our death that Christ died on the cross' (Denney, *The Death of Christ*, p. 84); and he continues to suffer with us in our folly and in our anguished plight, interceding for us by the Spirit with sighs too deep for words as we wait for our redemption (Rom. 8: 26, 23). Truly, 'the last enemy to be destroyed is death' (I Cor. 15: 26), and we live with an awareness of its power to create fear and to curtail the development and growth of that which is good.

But as Christians, death never has the final word; for at the end, Jesus delivers the kingdom to God after destroying every rule and authority and power, including death (I Cor. 15: 54). The jaws of Christ's grave are large enough to consume even this enemy. In Christ, death has died. This is not because its terror has been evaded, but because it has been embraced. Its sting has been drawn. Not only, as a result, does hope extend beyond this earth; the experience of death and destruction *on* this earth is also within the spread of Christ's ample arm. This does not minimize the horror of death, rather it accentuates it. But it also assures that even this ultimate devastation pales before the extinguishing of God's life in Christ, which took place two thousand years ago. Only the eyes of faith can recognize that one death is sufficient to cover the extinction of everything. In our struggle to come to this perspective we face the extent to which we have failed to view all of life from the eyes of a lonely figure hanging on a tree outside Jerusalem (Heb. 13: 13).

The limitless scope of Christ's redeeming death reassures us that evil never has the final word, even the worst in human history is never

hopeless or devoid of possibility for God. But this in itself would be insufficient to encourage us to attempt to turn the energies of women and men away from the propagation of weapons or unimaginable destructive capability towards constructive purposes. It may reassure us that even the worst situation is never totally without hope and devoid of God ('Even the darkness is not dark to you, but the night is light as the day', Ps. 139). But is there a vision which will inspire us now and cause us to spend our best efforts in the cause of peace and disarmament? Ultimately, I place my hope in God's ability and desire to raise up peacemakers from among his Church, to recreate the life of his Son Jesus among us as we return to the way of the cross. Were the church to begin to follow Jesus in the way in which he travelled, the world would be fundamentally changed and nuclear weapons would be recognized for what they are: the devil's playthings.

In this vision there is less concern with church statements and more concern with action on the part of congregations and individual church members. The church itself has the power to bring peace, government's role is secondary; to focus our efforts solely on telling governments what to do is to miss our primary responsibility. The picture of a responsible church is one of a people without fear, living out their renunciation of evil. Employees in the nuclear weapons-related industries will form prayer groups and Bible studies to begin to discern together God's will for them as peacemakers in warmaking occupations. They will begin to inform their employers that they can no longer contribute to the manufacture of nuclear weapons. If they lose their jobs, they will continue to witness to those who remain in the industry. The issue is simple: will they co-operate with the processes of creation or destruction?

Even Christian soldiers and officers will make it clear that they will have nothing to do with preparations for nuclear war. Most leave the military. The Ministry of Defence and Pentagon prayer groups will no longer be content with the traditional separation of faith and politics, and they will find themselves having more in common with protesters than military strategists. War tax resistance will take off, becoming the norm among church members.

Pilgrimages to nuclear facilities will be a regular part of the church's life. What were designed to be tucked away and hidden from sight will become focal points for the church's prayer and worship; Christians will know where the nuclear bases are and will befriend the individuals that

work at them. Their prayer will include intercession specifically for those they know on the base, who are struggling with the meaning of their work. During Lent, and on the Feast of the Holy Innocents, at Peace Pentecost and on Hiroshima and Nagasaki Days, nuclear bases will be surrounded with prayer and celebration of the true God, as the idolatry of nuclear weapons is exposed.

It will be a peoples' grassroots movement and the identity of the church will be dramatically changed. Many will be drawn into this work of the Holy Spirit, people who previously felt that the church was totally without integrity and represented a denial of the life of the One it sought to serve. Almost all social commentators and theologians will make the connection between this spontaneous movement and the transformation of the church in Central America, as it was converted to the poor and began to regroup itself in the base-communities. It will be an utterly new thing, and it has already begun. (Reflections here inspired by 'A Dream' in *Waging Peace*.)³

This is the vision, the dream. It is an awesome picture because the cost to many will be great. The words of the gospels are taking on new meanings as the picture becomes reality, because they are seen to be directly applicable to the contemporary situation. Jesus said, 'There is no one who has left house, or parents, or brothers or sisters, or spouse, or children for the kingdom of God's sake, who shall not receive manifold more in this present time and, in the world to come, life everlasting' (Lk. 18: 29 ff.). Those in the midst of walking away from their jobs, their financial security for often twenty years or more, must be comforted by these words. Robert C. Aldridge, father of ten children and a former design engineer for the Polaris and Trident missile systems, resigns his job, realising that it contradicts all that he believes in and hopes for, despite the pressure it places on his family. The Chaplain at the Naval Submarine base in Bangor, Washington state, Father David Becker, hands in his notice, aware of the devastating power of the Trident submarine which is based there.

Others are taking awesome risks in different ways. Archbishop Raymond Hunthausen of Seattle informs his archdiocese in January 1982 that his conscience no longer permits him to pay that portion of his income tax earmarked for nuclear weapons production. In 1983, Canon Paul Oestricher in this country reaches the same decision. In May 1983 Christians from many different parts of Britain and representing many different denominational affinities gather at Upper Heyford

Air Force Base in Oxfordshire to worship and pray there. Early on Pentecost Sunday morning, they break bread and share the cup of suffering outside the base gates. The following day some enter the base for an act of prayer and intercession. In Washington, D.C., these events are being mirrored: the Washington Cathedral is filled with three thousand voices united in tribute to the Spirit of Peace, in preparation for the next day, Pentecost Monday, when two hundred and forty-two men and women enter the U.S. Capitol to pray and protest the nuclear weapons which are funded there.

It is only the beginning, but the signs of awakening are real. In this we can all find hope; but it is a hope that will be realised only after the cross of our Lord and Saviour is embraced afresh by those who would follow him.

Mark Mills-Powell is a curate at Huyton Parish Church.

NOTES:

- 1 *Waging Peace*, ed. Jim Wallis; Harper and Row, 1982 (available from Sojourners, address below), p. 87.
- 2 *Darkening Valley*, Dale Aukerman; S.P.C.K., 1983 (in U.S. by Seabury, 1981), p. 46.
- 3 *Waging Peace*, p. 252.

FOR FURTHER READING:

Nuclear Holocaust and Christian Hope. Ronald Sider and Richard Taylor; Hodder and Stoughton, 1983.

Time to Choose, A GrassRoots Study Guide on the Arms Race from a Christian Perspective. Celebration Publishing, 1983.

EXCELLENT BOOKS ON RELATED SUBJECTS AVAILABLE FROM:

Metanoia Book Service, The London Mennonite Centre, 14 Shepherds Hill, London N6 5AQ.

Sojourners Book Service, P.O. Box 29272, Washington, D.C., U.S.A. 20017.

Book Service, GrassRoots, 57 Dorchester Lane, Lytchett Minster, Nr. Poole, Dorset BH16 6JE.

Newspapers always excite curiosity. No one lays one down without a feeling of disappointment.

CHARLES LAMB (1775—1834).

Priorities in Health Care

BY JOHN ELFORD



ALL modern technologies have at least one thing in common; they are expensive. Medical technology is no exception. Its research, development, deployment and maintenance requires far more finance than is available, even in advanced economies. In less developed countries the same problems are endemic. This is the fundamental ethical problem of advanced medicine. It precedes the many such questions which arise from the use of specific types of medical technology and, important though they are, it is this prior question which deserves attention. What insights can Christians bring to bear in seeking answers to it?

The question raises the fundamental problem of economics; it concerns the distribution of limited resources. This is a social as well as an economic question, since it raises the issue of social justice. Christians do not have a monopoly in discussions about social justice, they are often put to shame by the examples given by non-Christians, but they do have a spiritual responsibility to pay attention to it. This is because love is related to justice and, although it is often too simple to say that 'justice is love distributed',¹ the suggestion is a useful one because it highlights the importance of relating love to the economic and social aspects of human welfare. There are, of course, Christians who seek to keep their spirituality apart from such issues and who stress the importance of otherworldly spiritual values, such as prayer and hope. But, important though these are, paying attention to them can never become a substitute for facing spiritually the social and economic implications of love itself. The gospel of love is an all-pervasive and incarnate gospel which, when it is doing its proper work, is always transforming and redeeming what is secular. This can only happen through political involvement with social and economic issues. But having a spiritual motivation for this involvement is no guarantee of unanimity about what it might require in detail. Like others, Christians have invariably disagreed about this. But such disagreements are no more a reason for not engaging with political issues than disagreements about beliefs are a reason for not believing.

To say that, because all human beings are created in the image of God they have an equal right to health care is an important, but not

self-evidently clear thing to say. It begs further questions about the relationship of rights to duties, as well as about what is meant by 'health' and 'care'. From a Christian point of view, individual rights often have to be put aside, or denied in the interests of others. Even at times, the right of life itself and 'health'—as we shall see below—means something far more than what it is often taken to mean; the absence of physical suffering. These qualifications apart, however, it remains helpful to say that Christian beliefs about the equality of all individuals in the sight of God underlie their approach to the problem. It is an obvious problem because individuals with equal rights to health care receive unequal shares of it. Two specific problems make the finding of simple solutions difficult. The first is the fact that the particular as well as the relative value of aspects of health care are much debated. The most common focus of such debate is dispute about the relative value of 'curative' health care, on the one hand and 'preventative' health care on the other. The second problem arises after agreements are reached about the first. Advocating the economic priority of some aspect of health care inevitably means that conflict will occur with other financial claims, e.g., education, housing, defence, etc.² Comparisons between the cost of, say, Trident missiles and the building of hospitals are often emotively made, and although it does not follow that if money is not spent on 'X' it will automatically be spent on 'Y', the comparisons can nevertheless be pressed.

In practice the greater part of money spent on health care is spent on 'curative' medicine which is hospital based. This centres on frequently dramatic feats of 'saving lives' and is related to an aura of research and development. Humankind's ancient quest for immortality will always survive as it now does largely in the hope that life can increasingly be prolonged through advances in curative medicine. But such medicine is the most expensive and it consumes resources of both money and manpower which cannot be put to other, equally justified if less dramatic, uses. Heart transplants are a poignant example of this since, inspiring though they are, they actually prevent the more widespread practice of less dramatic, but equally necessary, heart surgery. But *who* is to make decisions about where to concentrate limited resources? They require a knowledge which is wider than specific medical knowledge; it must include: a knowledge of public health, of economics and of politics. They also require authority to put them into effect, but who possesses such authority? Attempts to answer such

questions have never singularly succeeded. Ethical utilitarians, such as John Stuart Mill, who confidently held that relative means could be evaluated by considering the desirability of the ends they lead to, could say no more than that the people who made the decisions should be 'competent judges'.³ Neither Mill, nor other ethical utilitarians, were able to say anything about how such competence was to be recognised or about what authority was to be attached to its judgements. The ethical alternative, of saying that some things are 'good in themselves,' is no more helpful, since again it does not offer any way of comparing the relative merits of competing claims to such intrinsic goods. Christian ethical theory is as troubled by such problems as are secular ethics. It embraces these and other dilemmas and has to live with them. To pretend otherwise is to pretend that Christian ethics is something which it can never be; a resource for finding instant solutions to seemingly intractable problems. Such a pretence is itself not morally serious and often provokes the retort that ethical problems are too important to be discussed at a religious level.

Christian theology provides us with a view about the relationship between humankind and its achievements and this is our starting point. Technology is an artefact, it is created and, like all created things, it reflects its creator. What it reflects is the ambivalent nature of humankind, with its capacity for both good and evil. Novelty and innovation in technology is, therefore, not to be welcomed without first asking whether or not it is more creative of good than it is of evil. Difficult though this is to discern, particularly in medical technology, it has to be attempted. It is the issue which lies behind a host of questions about the desirability, or otherwise, of implementing the use of particular pieces of medical technology; leading examples are, questions about the prolongation of life by extraordinary means and those about *in vitro* fertilization and other forms of experimental embryology. Unless we can say 'no' to some technology, and unless we can subject it to social control, then all questions about human values will become lost in the wake of a runaway innovative technology. The medical profession has already pioneered progress in this direction. The social controls on the use of synthetic drugs are the main example, but its real work is only just beginning in this field.

Here we face the problem of the extent to which Christian theology should engage itself in the details of medical technology, of its saying whether or not specific items of technology are to be encouraged or

rejected. Some theologians have attempted to solve this difficulty by saying that it is their task only to outline broad guidelines which leave specialists in the field to decide what such guidelines might mean in detail. Whilst such a view enables non-specialists, such as the majority of Christian theologians, to respect the special preserve of experts, it does leave open questions about whether or not some aspects of medical technology are so undesirable that they have to be explicitly singled out either for rejection or for permitting only under carefully defined circumstances. In some instances, such as e.g. that of *in vitro* fertilization, 'general guidelines' might not be enough, and theologians have to face the possibility that, in order to witness to beliefs they hold about the value of life, they have to be more specific about what practices they will and will not support.

One issue which Christian theology can be expected to discuss in relation to such detail is the meaning of 'health' itself. Here the prevailing tendency to suppose that it means simply 'the absence of disease' needs to be challenged, as it has been by, e.g. M. Wilson in *Health is for People*.⁴ Wilson claims that health is 'a positive quality of well being'⁵ which is not to be identified exclusively with the absence of disease. Its roots lie as much in the individual's social relationships as in his or her physical well being. The point of this observation is to stress that the placing of vast resources at the disposal of means of 'curing' diseases will not do as much to promote general health as is commonly supposed. Wilson takes the view that, although it is difficult to be precise, it is likely that about half the illnesses in the U.K. are emotional or behavioural in origin. They, therefore, have a large claim on the limited financial resources for the promotion of health. Wilson acknowledges that, for this to be possible, less money will be spent on specific items of high technology curative medicine and that some individuals who would otherwise live will die. 'Our fear of health leads us to use death as the final incontrovertible argument. We are prepared to tolerate much human misery, overcrowding and meaninglessness in order to save a few lives. We tolerate death in the quality of life on a large scale in order to prolong a few lives biologically'.⁶ Wilson's point is a radical one: it claims that there are good theological reasons for thinking that the resources for health care need drastic re-direction. This is a specific claim which, of course, remains to be worked out in more detail, showing just what items of 'curative' medical technology should not be supported and, further

how the then available resources should be spent. Wilson's argument, however, is an illustration of the often radical challenge which Christian theology makes to prevailing answers to questions about priorities in health care.

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NOTES:

- 1 J. Fletcher, *Situation Ethics* (S.C.M.) pp. 87 ff.
- 2 cf. A. V. Campbell, *Medicine, Health and Justice* (Churchill Livingstone, 1978) p. 74.
- 3 J. S. Mill, *Utilitarianism* (Everyman's Library, 1910) p. 10.
- 4 M. Wilson, *Health is for People* D.L. & T., 1975).
- 5 *Ibid*, p. 2.
- 6 *Ibid*, p. 79.

Apocalypse: Vehicle of Utopianism?

BY CHRISTOPHER ROWLAND



APOCALYPSE is a word which is to be found frequently in contemporary political and economic commentaries. The nuclear threat is described as 'apocalyptic'; the saga of the debt crisis affecting Third World countries in the eyes of some represents the advent of the apocalypse. We may pass over such usage without asking too many questions, because we have some rough idea of what it is that writers are seeking to say. It is apparent that what the writers have in mind is the cataclysmic transformation of the world order set out in such lurid detail in the book of Revelation, the Apocalypse of Jesus Christ (Rev. 1: 1). We make the connections, therefore, between that neglected New Testament book and certain threats to the stability and order of our society without too much difficulty.

The question is, however, whether we are doing justice to the insights of biblical apocalyptic by resting content with such an understanding of the apocalypse. I believe that we are not piercing to the

heart of the phenomenon of apocalyptic simply by equating apocalypse with cosmic catastrophe. Scholars are divided over their interpretations of apocalyptic, but most now make a clear distinction between the apocalypse and the apocalyptic. The former they use to speak of a literary work which purports to offer disclosures of divine mysteries, whereas the latter they use to describe the particular religious outlook which is to be found in the apocalypses. It is over the character of that religious outlook that there has been most debate.

Apocalypse is principally about disclosure or revelation, not about catastrophe (the Greek *apokalypsis* means revelation). It may certainly involve the disclosure of the imminent demise of the present world order, but neither the biblical apocalypses nor, in particular, the Jewish apocalypses written round about the beginning of the Christian era are concerned solely with this issue. We can only appreciate the significance of apocalyptic (i.e. the outlook of the apocalypses) when we recognise that the dominant concern in these writings is with disclosure of divine mysteries. That means disclosure of things *as they really are*, whether they be earthly or heavenly. The apocalypses offer an understanding of the world and its inhabitants from God's perspective and a way of looking at history which does not countenance the indefinite opposition of the world to the righteousness of God.

All these concerns are at the heart of the book of Revelation, are they not? The Risen Christ appears to John. He reveals the character of the churches and their discipleship (chapters 1—3), the sovereignty of God over the universe (chapter 4), the unfolding of the divine purposes for the world (chapters 5 ff.) and the evil character of the state (chapters 13 and 17). It would be inappropriate to equate apocalypse with disaster, therefore. The message of the apocalypses are much more significant than that. Apocalyptic concerns the true nature of people, institutions, circumstances and events. It rejects a facile acceptance of things as they appear to be. The New Testament apocalypse challenges the complacency of Christians who think that they are spiritually mature (the letter to the church at Laodicaea, 3: 14 ff.). It offers the true picture of the state as diabolically inspired (chapter 13) and doomed to destruction at the hands of its own supporters (chapter 17). Thereby it challenges those whose political complacency may have led them to suppose that there could be an accommodation between Christ and Caesar.

It is widely supposed that such a polarisation between church and state arose when the forces of the state were being mobilised against Christians. The evidence from Revelation and other non-Christian sources, that the book was written at a time of persecution and that that there was persecution of Christians by Domitian, is not as great as some have supposed. Of course, the prophecy *predicts* persecution (e.g. 6: 9, 7: 14 and chapters 11 and 13), but most commentators agree that there was probably only sporadic local persecution of Christians (2: 13) rather than any official action taken by the state.

Of course, by stressing the setting of Revelation in a situation of persecution we can effectively marginalise its significance for ourselves; after all, *we* are not undergoing persecution, are we? But the message of Revelation and the apocalyptic approach to the understanding of human affairs are too important to be put on one side for the time when *we are* being persecuted. Its symbolism and disconcerting concern with divine judgement should not prevent us from allowing its uncomfortable perspective to challenge, and perhaps widen, our rather cosy political assumptions about the relationship between church and state.

You will gather from what I have just said that I do think that the apocalypses do have relevance for us today. Firstly, we cannot simply ignore the cataclysmic element which looms largest in popular appreciation of the apocalyptic, though we must not make it the sole criterion for our understanding of the apocalypses. Visions of perfection such as Rev. 21 f. and accounts of their realisation necessarily demand the replacement of the imperfect. When what is imperfect is regarded as permanent and the inadequate and unjust the norm, then inevitably there has to be an upheaval of overwhelming proportions before what is perfect can be established. The prophet's vision of hope goes hand in hand with the message of judgement and the call to repentance. The conviction that a better way is needed necessarily involves the assertion that continuing in the present paths will ultimately lead to disaster.

Secondly, I would want to argue that apocalyptic is utopian in both a negative and a positive sense. While it certainly can offer a vision of a better world, it can all too easily be a retreat from reality into a realm of light where God dwells surrounded by his angels. One of the distinctive features of the apocalyptic literature is the contrasts, not only between the present and the future, but also between the world below and the world above. For the writers of the apocalypses the world of light where God dwells is the type of the future kingdom on earth:

'thy Kingdom come; thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven'. But all too easily the world above can cease to be the world of the future and become a goal in itself, the true destiny of the saint and the mystic. The end of that religious world is gnosticism, the epitome of radical other-worldliness.

On the other hand utopian thought offers such a marked contrast between the vision of perfection and the inadequacies of the present that it can become the basis of a prophetic critique of the present world order and an inspiration towards the establishment of the new. I would suggest that such an outlook is indeed typical of a significant strand within the biblical writings from Deuteronomy via the prophetic writings and the Synoptic Gospels to the book of Revelation. Throughout the history of the church such utopian dreams have from time to time been translated into reality and have ceased to be the fantasies of visionaries and the place of retreat of mystics. Still, in the opinion of many, these attempts are regarded as the eccentric actions of the fanatical fringe. Perhaps the principalities and powers have effectively cut short the various experiments, but in the apocalypses the vision lives on. The task of critical reflection from the divine perspective remains an imperative; the challenge remains to criticise our ideological constructions and the practice which flows from them in the light of the apocalypse of Jesus Christ.

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We had fed the heart on fantasies,
The heart's grown brutal from the fare
More substance in our enmities
Than in our love.

W. B. YEATS.

The Stare's Nest by the Window.



Brother Nicholas and friends.